

Chapter II: Outdoor Recreation Issues, Trends and Survey Findings

The fact that we live in a world that moves crisis by crisis does not make a growing interest in outdoor activities frivolous, or ample provision for them unworthy of the nation's concern. –JOHN F. KENNEDY, Thirty-fifth US President (1961—63), 1917—63

The information presented throughout the *2007 Virginia Outdoor Plan* makes a strong case for renewed emphasis on outdoor recreation facilities and open space. The identification of outdoor recreation issues for the *2007 VOP* is comprehensive and involves various methods. The *2007 VOP* planning process incorporates citizen involvement through public meetings, a citizen survey, an inventory of parks and recreation facilities for each jurisdiction and research by outdoor recreation and conservation professionals. The technical process and standards for determining the demand supply and needs for outdoor recreation facilities is outlined in Appendix __. An overview to the demands, supply and needs inventory and 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey is outlined in this chapter.

Changes in demographics have and will continue to influence outdoor recreation issues, trends and survey findings. Demographics along with other outdoor recreation issues that are not directly addressed in program areas are detailed in Chapter VIII. Outdoor Recreation Planning and other Related Issues. Finally and most importantly, the *2007 VOP* takes the information gathered on a statewide basis and analyzes it by region. The issues, trends and 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey findings are reflected in recommendations for regional outdoor recreation and conservation goals for each PDC in the *2007 VOP*.

Public input related to outdoor recreation

Public meetings held in fall 2005 provided citizens and local governments the opportunity to comment on outdoor recreation, open space and conservation issues. The comments related to outdoor recreation have set the tone for the research and outdoor recreation and conservation recommendations throughout the VOP. In general, the comments reflect a changing Virginia with citizens having greater concern for the outdoor environment and awareness of diminishing opportunities, as open space lands are lost to development.

Major statewide issues highlighted in these public meetings cover a range of topics categorized and summarized below:

Issues Identified in Fall 2005 Public Meetings for the Virginia Outdoors Plan

Topic	Issues
General Trends Related to Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sedentary work and longer work hours • Automobile constraints including increased gas costs, traffic congestion, air quality advisories and longer commutes limiting time at home. • Deteriorating park and recreation infrastructure. • Declining park and recreation budgets relative to costs. • Increasing competition for shrinking federal, state, and local tax resources. • Busy lives and scheduled family activities limit impromptu outdoor recreation. • Increasing cultural diversity brings varied outdoor ethics and attitudes and a need for multi-lingual outdoor education. • Difficulty in providing equal opportunity for leisure to all people • Declining quality of life and livability of urban areas due to insufficient open space and deteriorating urban resources. • Greater division between socioeconomic status of citizens. • Increased public demand for participation, accountability and productivity in government. • Increasing crime (violence, drug use, vandalism, gangs) in communities and parks. • Privatization of outdoor recreation programming, faith based communities and non-profit organizations continue to provide additional facilities and programs in many areas of the state.

<p>Nature deficit disorder The <i>Environmental and Land Stewardship Education</i> chapter further addresses this issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many people, particularly children, are not experiencing the out of doors. Richard Louv in his book <i>Last Child in the Woods</i> defines this problem as nature deficit disorder, or stated more simply a disconnect with nature. The lack of outdoor experiences leads to a decline in understanding of the natural world and its role in supporting life on the planet. This disconnect is also leading to major health problems as well as contributing to inactive lifestyles, especially among our youngest citizens.
<p>Benefits of Parks, Recreation & Open Space The <i>Economic Benefits of Recreation, Open Space and Conservation</i> chapter and the <i>Health and Wellness</i> section of the <i>Outdoor Recreation Programs Chapter</i> further address this issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to articulate the economic benefits of outdoor recreation, including eco-tourism and the link to healthy lifestyles. • Cost benefit analyses for parks, recreation and open space need to include the benefits of outdoor facilities and the contribution of open space to the health of the environment. • Lack of comprehensive plans and zoning laws for green infrastructure and open space in new developments needs to be addressed to mitigate the long-term impact on the environment and resulting costs. • There is a need to integrate outdoor recreation and recreation programming for social benefits contributing to a sense of community and quality of life. • Citizens need closer-to-home recreational opportunities that result in frequent and continued use and improved health benefits for their families.

Environmental impacts due to the loss of open space lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased runoff/degraded water quality • Loss of tree canopy • Lack of available land • Loss of land for outdoor activities, especially those that require large parcel of land • Light pollution • Poor air quality impacts on vegetation/recreation experience • Loss of viewsheds and cultural landscapes
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<p>Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities The <i>Trails and Greenways</i> section of Chapter VII and the <i>Transportation Programs</i> section of Chapter IX further addresses this issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to encourage Rails to Trails and Trails with Trails to meet the growing needs for multipurpose trails. • There is a need to encourage walkable/livable Communities with safe routes to schools. • There is a lack of self-powered commuter support systems such as bike lockers and showers for commuters. • There is a need to target education for motorists and bicyclists.
<p>Trails and Greenways The <i>Trails and Greenways</i> section of Chapter VII further addresses this issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for planning and funding and desire to include linear outdoor recreation facilities as part of green infrastructure. • Stress multiple benefits of trails and greenways to include integration of wildlife corridors and the positive effects of linear corridors on water quality. • Need to manage trails for multiple uses. • The need for trails access to recreational waters.
<p>Land Conservation The Chapter III: <i>Land Conservation</i> and Chapter IV: <i>Green Infrastructure</i> further addresses this issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to integrate private property rights into conservation planning. • There is a need to conserve lands immediately due to rising real estate value. • There is a need to address development pressures on all Virginia lands. • Land conservation assessment • Land Use alternatives need to address sprawl and open space preservation • There is a need for resources to promote natural resource protection • The need to protect the Chesapeake Bay in accordance with the 2000 Bay agreement is imperative.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a growing need to protect working lands. • Loss of viewsheds and cultural landscapes.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to locate utilities underground in park settings. • Location of cell phone towers outside of scenic park boundaries. • There is a need to address the aesthetic impact on the landscape for the location of cell phone towers and windmills and their impact. • There is a need to implement Geographic Positioning System (GPS) and Geographic Information System (GIS) in planning and implementing outdoor recreation. • There is a need to expand information technology to increase education about outdoor recreation and land conservation.
Foundations and Friends Groups The <i>Private Sector</i> section of Chapter ___ further addresses this issue.	There is a need to leverage the influence of nonprofits for citizen participation, volunteer contributions, training, building community capacity and fundraising.

Subheading of Public Input Related to Outdoor Recreation

Demographics

Citizens recognized trends in population growth and demographics (see Chapter VIII). The population is anticipated to increase from 7,567,000 to 8,601,900 by 2020 (www.coopercenter.org, 2006). Related to increased population is the increased demand for outdoor recreation to meet needs for an aging population, including accessibility for all citizens. The Hispanic population and growth through immigration is also anticipated to increase. The aging population may be the leading reason the demand for active sports is shifting to individual and passive recreation, such as walking facilities. As more adults and children engage in electronic leisure, technology becomes incorporated into outdoor opportunities such as geocaching, digital cameras and cell phones. Citizens concerned about increases in health risks and chronic disease related to obesity were especially interested in accessible outdoor recreation opportunities in their communities. With populations increasing and demographics changing in Virginia. A higher demand for outdoor recreation and open space combined with a changing clientele is emerging.

Demand, Supply and Needs for Outdoor Recreation

The 1965 *Virginia's Common Wealth* addressed for the first time in Virginia the correlation of population and recreation resource demand to a statewide program addressing the adequacy of recreation facilities. The 1965 plan used National Recreation Association (NRPA) guidelines to estimate the needs for recreation lands and facilities. The plan considered state provided outdoor recreation needs based on 90 acres per one thousand persons. In developing needs consideration for the availability and cost of land, the rural, urban and industrial nature of a locality, population demographics and income, accessibility to the open countryside, woodlands, streams, seashore and natural areas were to be considered.

A Virginia standard of 10 acres per 1000 person is used to project acreage needed for state parks. Given this standard 75,675 acres of State Park lands are needed to adequately meet the demand. The 36 Virginia State Parks include approximately 72,302 acres, leaving a deficit of 3,373 acres of state parkland. With Virginia being in the top ten fastest growing states, it is anticipated the acres of state parkland based on population will increase to 86,019 acres of State Park lands by 2020.

Factors that affect the demand for outdoor recreation include Virginia's population as well as out of state visitors. Tourism and out of state visitors have continuously risen over the years. The estimated number of visitors in 1965 was approximately 26,000,000 and the number of visitors in 2005 was estimated at 54,800,000 (vatc.org, October 2006). While every Virginian may not use recreation areas, it is almost certain that visitor to Virginia not only use the recreation facilities, but in many cases recreation areas are key destinations. The combination of tourism and recreation are significant to Virginia's economy. Local and regional partnerships are developing for nature tourism and recreation destinations increasing the demand for Virginia's outdoor recreation beyond the projections based on resident population estimates.

Mobility based on roads, public transportation and multimodal transportation options also affect the demand and trends for outdoor recreation areas and facilities. A subsection of Chapter IX, Transportation Programs, is a new inclusion in this VOP to address transportation initiatives and their interface with outdoor recreation. With many populated areas dealing with more traffic congestion and workers commuting longer distances throughout Virginia, user groups desire less travel time to recreation destinations. For many frequently repeated activities, persons indicate a travel time of 15 minutes to 30 minutes is acceptable. This change effects recreational facility demands, especially for areas with growing populations.

The results of a demand supply and needs analysis for outdoor recreation facilities is used along with input from the public to form *2007 VOP* recommendations. Data relating to the percentage of population participating in each activity and the mean numbers of participation days per year is used to estimate the demand for recreational areas and facilities. The supply of outdoor recreation facilities area based on a statewide inventory of recreational areas and facilities. This inventory is updated every five years as part of the outdoor recreation planning process and is maintained by DCR. Finally, the demand and supply are used to calculate the need for recreational lands and facilities. Identified needs are important in directing the expenditure of local, state and federal funds as well as guiding private sector in outdoor recreation investments. An estimate of outdoor recreation areas and facility needs are available on a statewide and planning district basis.

Subheading of Demand Supply and Needs for Outdoor Recreation

Statewide Goals, Benchmarks and Evaluation

Based on the demand, supply and needs analysis the *2007 VOP* indicates the primary goal for outdoor recreation in the next five years is to meet the needs for trails and greenways and public access to recreational waters throughout the state. The trends indicated in the fall 2005 public meetings and the 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey findings have been evaluated and support these statewide goals. Key recommendations in the *2007 VOP* propose initiating a statewide trails and greenways planning process to incorporate various stakeholders and the public input process to better meet the growing demand. Recommendations for continuing a water access program to address recreational needs incorporates strong partnerships between localities, planning districts and various state agencies including, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Virginia Coastal Management Program, Virginia Marine Resources and the Department of Transportation. Public access and information about existing and potential water trails along rivers and streams is growing in popularity and being recognized for contributions to local economies. The *2007 VOP* recommends that DCR continue to offer technical support and coordination with localities for development and management of water trails.

Regional goals generally reflect the statewide trends, but the implementation and specific needs may vary. The goals and benchmarks for outdoor recreation are summarized in each of the planning district chapters of this plan. Regions that show surpluses of recreational facilities may be tourist destinations and actually experience shortages during prime recreation seasons.

Virginia Outdoors Survey

The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey was a cooperative project between the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and Virginia Commonwealth University. The survey combines information about individual outdoor recreation activities, state park usage preferences and opinions on natural resources and conservation. Information about the various specific activities is included in the program areas of this *2007 VOP*. This chapter summarizes of key findings from the survey.

An overwhelming 91.9 percent of the persons surveyed indicated that having access to outdoor recreational opportunities was important or very important. Participation is most likely on weekends; however, with flexibility in work schedules and the numbers of retired or semi-retired persons increasing, almost one-third or 28% of those answering the survey participate in outdoor recreation equally on weekends and during the week. With demographics in Virginia shifting to an aging population, the number of persons who enjoy outdoor recreation both during the week and on weekends is likely to increase over the next five years.

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Land Conservation & Green Infrastructure

Natural and Open Space Protection

The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey gathered information on natural and open space protection that relates directly to the land conservation and green infrastructure themes of the *2007 VOP*. When asked how important it was to protect Virginia's natural and open space resources 94% of households responding indicated it was important or very important. Only 2% of those responding did not think it important to protect these resources and another 4% responded they did not know if it was important.

As a follow-up question, the survey inquired if the state should spend public funds to acquire lands to prevent the loss of exceptional natural areas to development? Approximately 78% felt public funds should be used to protect lands awhile 8% did not want to use public funds and 14% did not know. When then asked how public monies should be used to project Virginia's natural and open space resources the following options were ranked:

- 71% favored outright purchase from willing sellers of the property, and then management as a natural area or park for public use.
- 24% preferred the purchase of easements that reduce development rights, but leave the land in private ownership with some public use allowed.
- 5% preferred the purchase of easements that reduce development rights, but leave the land in private ownership without public use opportunities.

Clearly from the responses above, the citizens of the Commonwealth prefer a public access to lands acquired or protected by the state. The demands for natural areas and parks support this position as popularity increases for these outdoor recreation areas.

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Types of Outdoor Recreation Lands

When survey participants were polled about their preferences for outdoor recreation facilities the balance of developed parks and natural area parks were important. Approximately one-third of those responding had no preference as to the type of park which further strengthens the trend for a desire for outdoor recreation, open space and natural areas in the Commonwealth.

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Types of Parks Desired in Virginia

Type of Park	Survey Preference
Developed Parks	39%
Natural Area Parks	31%
No Preference	30%

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Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Virginia State Parks

The summary of trends, issues and needs for Virginia's State Parks are found in Chapter IX. The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey reinforces the popularity and importance of State Parks to Virginians. When asked for the top three reasons for having a system of state parks, survey respondents indicated the following:

- Conserving and protecting natural resources 61%
- Providing places to explore and enjoy their natural and cultural heritage 59%
- Providing places for a variety of outdoor recreational activities contributing to a healthy lifestyle 54%

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Outdoor Recreation Activities Rankings

Activities that have remained consistent in use and have not been as effected by trends and changes in the past ten years are not expected to change significantly in the future include picnicking, playground use, visiting gardens and arboretums, jogging and backpacking. The 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey indicates the following rank for activities surveyed. Popular outdoor activities ranked in 1965, 1996 and 2002 are shown on the bar chart.

Virginia Outdoors Survey
Percentage of Households Participating in Activities

1965	2006	Activity	% of pop. 2006	% of pop. 2002	% of pop. 1996
Rank	Rank				
3	1	Walking for Pleasure	72%	67.1%	65%
5*	2	Visiting Historic Sites	56%	40.4%	35%
1	3	Driving for Pleasure	55%	62.4%	60%
2	4	Swimming	44%	52.2%	53%

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11	5	Visiting Nat. Areas, Parks	44%	26.9%	24%
N/A	6	Sunbathing on Beach	36%	39.1%	42%
7	7	Fishing	26%	42.0%	29%
6	8	Picnicking	26%	28.7%	31%
N/A	9	Using a playground	25%	24.4%	24%
10	10	Boating	24%	34.1%	31%
N/A	11	Jogging	24%	21.5%	20%
N/A	12	Visiting Gardens/Arboretums	21%	21.6%	20%
8	13	Bicycling	21%	39.7%	31%
13	14	Camping	18%	28.2%	26%
16	15	Hiking/Backpacking	16%	18.3%	15%
4*		Playing Outdoor Sports			
	16	Golf	14%	25.1%	20%
	17	Basketball	12%	15.4%	12%
	18	Fitness Trail	10%	7.3%	6%
	19	Soccer	9%	8.7%	6%
	20	Snow Skiing/Boarding	9%	11.9%	13%
	21	Tennis	8%	16.2%	20%
12	22	Hunting	7%	13.8%	17%

4* Playing outdoor sports was ranked 5th most popular outdoor activity in 1965; however the individual sports were not ranked.

5* Sightseeing was ranked in 1965 and not historic sites.

Attending outdoor sports events was ranked 9th in 1965 and not in subsequent years.

Horseback riding was ranked 14th in 1965 and 25th with 5.8% of the population participating in 2005.

Water skiing was ranked 15th in 1965 and 34th with 4% of the population participating 2005.

Attending outdoor concerts/drama was ranked in 1965 and not in subsequent years.

(Data from Virginia Outdoors Surveys 1996, 2002 & 2006.

1965 Data from Virginia's Common Wealth, November 1965.)

(Quote to be placed near the list of activities)

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What do you suppose will satisfy the soul, except to walk?

–**WALT WHITMAN**, *from Laws for Creations*, 1860

End Quote Pullout]

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Water Access

Based on the 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey over 50% of the public surveyed felt the most needed outdoor recreation opportunities include public access to state waters for boating fishing swimming and beach use. The 1965 *Virginia Common Wealth* projected that swimming would be the most popular activity in 2000. While swimming is still very popular as 4th among outdoor recreation opportunities, swimming has declined from 52% household participation in 2000 to 44% participation in 2006. Most swimmers choose an outdoor or indoor pool setting rather than a natural body of water. The concern for water quality in primary contact sports may be a part of this trend. Also, the natural water bodies accessible within thirty minutes of the population are limited, making the use of local outdoor and indoor pools more convenient.

Fishing is also a popular outdoor recreation activity dependent on water access. It is ranked the 7th most popular outdoor recreational activity with 26% of households surveyed participating. Slightly more Virginians indicate they fish in freshwater rather than saltwater and that may be a result of travel time to water bodies from population centers. Eighty to eighty-five percent of all fishing takes place on public water bodies. This further increases the demand for adequate public access at both freshwater and saltwater locations.

Boating ranks as the 10th most popular outdoor recreational activity. The increase in the number of canoes and kayaks is a growing trend that impacts the types of water access needed. Next to swimming, canoeing and kayaking is the next most popular water based sport with 9.3% of households participating.

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Trails & Greenways

Trails and greenways rank alongside water access as equally important to citizens responding to the 2006 Virginia Outdoor Survey. Some 49% of those surveyed indicated a high need for walking and hiking facilities. Walking for pleasure is Virginia's most popular outdoor activity with 71.7 percent of those surveyed indicated it was their favorite outdoor recreation activity. In addition to those walking were another 16% hike and backpack. Walking for pleasure and providing safe places for the public to enjoy being outdoors while walking is anticipated to continue to increase with population growth in Virginia. Trails and greenways programs at the local, regional and state levels will help meet the increasing demand for safe, aesthetically pleasing walking opportunities (See Chapter VII).

Thirty-nine percent of the public surveyed felt trails for bicycling were needed. This high ranking of perceived need expresses a desire by the public to have safe places to bicycle. Approximately 5% of all those surveyed actually mountain bike and 20% road bike. However, 40% of those same respondents felt there was a need for trails for bicycling. Given this response rate, the provision of safe places to bicycle could increase the popularity of this activity.

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Natural Areas

The growing trend for visiting natural areas is somewhat related to walking for pleasure as well as Virginia's aging population. In fact, over the past 10 years the participation rate for visiting natural areas has increased from 24% of households to 44% of households surveyed making this activity the 5th most popular outdoor recreation activity ranked in the 2006 Virginia Outdoor Survey. Of those persons surveyed, the need for access to natural areas was recognized as third most important next to walking and hiking. This trend to visit natural areas may reflect the increase in the number of state owned natural areas and parks funded by the general obligation bond in 1992 and 2002 as well as the increase in population associate with urbanization.

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Hunting

Another significant trend in outdoor recreation activities indicated in the 2006 Virginia Outdoor Survey is the decline in the numbers of hunters in Virginia. In the past ten years, hunting has decreased from an activity engaged in by 17% of households in 1994 to 7% of households in 2006. The continued change in land use patterns from rural to urban and suburban has driven this change. The lack of access to previously hunted private lands due to landowner changes has also driven a change in supply of lands for hunting. In fact, where lands remain rural, hunting participation rates are much higher than in the urban crescent.

Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Camping

A similar, but not so dramatic change in the numbers of persons camping is noted as a result of the 2006 Virginia Outdoor Survey. In 1965 camping was the 13th most popular outdoor activity and in 2006 it ranks 14th in popularity. The percent of households who camp have dropped from 26% in 1996 to 18% in 2006. Of those camping 63% camp at public sites with 55% of these using a state park or other state land. Approximately 70 percent of campers use tents and prefer drive in campsites. Amenities most important to campers include flush toilets, showers, paved roads and a grocery store.

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Types of State Park Campsites Preferred by Survey Respondents

Campsite with water/electric	61%
Tent camping without water/electric	25%
Pack in campsite	4%
Canoe/boat in campsite	10%

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Subheading Virginia Outdoors Survey

Public vs. Private Lands for Outdoor Recreation

Of those surveyed, the only sport in which over 60% of participants used private recreation areas was for snow skiing and snow boarding. Due to Virginia's climate, for these sports to be viable, only those resorts capable of creating snow offer these activities. All other outdoor recreation opportunities are conducted mostly on public lands. Even participants in golf, tennis and volleyball indicated that over 63% of their activities in these sports were held on public property.

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Active Sports Participation

Active sports remain popular outdoor recreation activities for Virginians. Over 80% of soccer, softball, basketball and baseball are played at public facilities. Surprisingly, over 63% of all golf, tennis and volleyball are also played at publicly owned facilities. Participation rates for active sports surveyed on the 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey are shown below.

Sport	Virginia Household Participation Rate
Golf	14.6%
Basketball	12.5%
Soccer	9.2 %
Tennis	8.6%
Softball	7.5%
Football	5.8%
Baseball	5.5%
Volleyball	3.4%

(2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey)

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